

"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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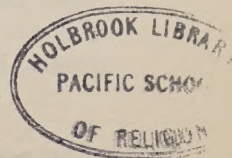
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A Time for Clear Thinking on Rural Affairs

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I have observed, or been a part of, the Extension Service during the ups and downs, during periods of high and low morale. We have seen times when new technology and applied agricultural science was quick money in the pocket, highly sought after. But some of us have also known times when the two blades of grass instead of one -- let's bring it up to date and say 10 blades -- have been called a curse.

At such a time the robes of the priesthood of efficiency and progress suddenly seem tarnished. First the disadvantaged raise their voices in protest. Then even our best friends, those who took our advice and cashed in on it, pat us on the back sadly and say, "You have done well - but for goodness sake see what you can do about these prices. I can stand this for a couple of years, but not forever." Then they too lend ear to the politicians and the Utopians and set about hedging their bets on efficiency with government programs that put a premium on inefficiency. Perhaps we too, as we pass among our rival fellowmen, have our misgivings about the worthwhileness of the productivity which we have made possible.

It is possible that we are looking at trends leading to an agriculture unrecognizable by present standards. Perhaps we face the elimination of extension work, or of Prairie Farmer.

If our traditional marketing system should fail, and farming should become an appendix of large-scale food processing and retailing operations, strictly on a contract basis, there may be no need for county agents. At

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least the county agent will be working for the Company, taking and giving orders as well as vending information, or he will have to be more of a specialist than he is today, and if he is, he can't be a good county agent.

Maybe I could bring myself to believe the only important thing is to produce more and get it into the hands of more people. Then perhaps I could drift with this tide in full confidence that the shore on which agriculture is eventually washed up is the best possible place for it.

But you and I are educators, and leaders. We're here to help build the future, not to succumb to it. We should get together with the people we are supposed to serve and decide what is best and go about achieving it. The Extension Service is not a creature of the laboratory or the classroom, even though we get much of our material from these sources. Our programs are of the community, of personal relationships, of the weighing of human values in the field, on the job.

We speak glibly of the adjustment in agriculture. How about the adjustment that must take place in the minds and activities of those who serve the rural community? Ours is indeed an enormous task. Personally, I am groping for guidance from every reasonable source. I hope you are puzzled too, because a lot of the patterns we have followed in the past aren't going to work any more.

First, let's get rid of a few illusions that come under the heading of easy ways out.

Agriculture and rural life are synonymous.

We know now this is not true as agriculture becomes more of a business, rural life must establish new boundaries. There are now as many or more non-farm people in the country as there are full-time farmers. Yet we are reluctant to recognize this fact in framing our programs.

Efficiency will solve our production and marketing problems.

There are two fallacies here that we must watch out for, even if efficiency will always remain one of our greatest goals in farming. Many bargaining factors in the nation's economy conspire to rob the farmer of the fruits of his efficiency. Can anything be done about this? Also no one, certainly not the Extension Service, can assume that economic efficiency and the acquisition of its material fruits is the principal goal in life.

Our growing population will soon catch up with and pass our food supply.

This has been used repeatedly as an excuse for failure to deal

farm should be a busy and productive unit, with enough pressure toward efficiency so that the farm family is a constructive unit in our society. It is with great reluctance that I look ahead to the possibility of agriculture being organized strictly on industrial lines.

Can the family unit go it alone without some protection from government in the form of management of land resources and market supply? I doubt it. I think we must try to perfect a system whereby the government assumes some responsibility, and the farm family retains a good share of decision and initiative.

In this connection, I believe we need to take another look at our cooperatives to see if they can pick up a part of the responsibility. Extension to a large extent fathered our cooperative organizations, but in recent years has backed away from them. In the meantime the co-ops have gravitated into the easier and safer business services and shied away from the difficult but more pressing job of bargaining for the farmer in the marketing arena.

This bargaining function is becoming very important indeed. If contract farming should grow, bargaining units will be absolutely necessary. If we are to establish our own bargaining pattern instead of adopting the bossism and intimidation and monopoly of big labor, which most of us disapprove, we had better get busy. Perhaps Extension should get back into the act. Organizing and bargaining require philosophic guidance and organizational skill. I think the development of these skills is a proper function of education, and certainly are more needed now than higher yields of farm crops.

Lest you get the idea I think efficiency and technological improvement are unimportant, or bad, let me say here that these will have an essential place in our work for the foreseeable future. It will be the responsibility of every extension worker to keep abreast these developments and to keep the pipelines of information. Also the responsibility of Extension to develop specialists much better informed in specialized fields.

At the same time, let's have no illusions about the growing importance of balancing our training in the direction of the broader interests of rural people -- meaning all those who live in the country. Let's take another look at the rural family we are working for. No longer can we delegate the job of balancing rural life to the home demonstration and youth leaders.

There is cold comfort for mother in the gleaming appliances which line the walls of her modern farm kitchen if children find no joy in the home and father is growing ulcers running more tractors over more acres.

Preservation and Improvement of free enterprise in agriculture is a worthy goal.

I am often irked by the tendency in our day to make free enterprise or capitalism into a religion. I prefer rather to look upon it as an imperfect economic system which has served us well and which provides the best economic climate for the exercise of human freedom. Let's admit that capitalism has an inherent ruthlessness which must be tamed and tempered by social responsibility and Christian conscience. Yes, even legislation.

Nevertheless, it does seek to put human talents to full use. It concerns itself and multiplication, not with division as do the socialistic ideologies. It raises the challenge of man against resources, not man against man. It is based on the notion that man acquires material wealth by developing the resources of the earth, not by stealing from other men.

Do we dare apply these principles to agriculture? Are we willing to say it is a good thing if our food needs can be met by five percent of the population while 95 percent turn to the production and development of other desirable goods and services?

I believe any up-to-date philosophy of rural life should leave this door of opportunity open.

A word of warning here, however! I fear many of the advocates of free enterprise in our day are stubborn and unrealistic. There are many restrictions on freedom in this complex and much compromised society of ours. The time may be here when we must levy on ourselves certain rules to save the family farm and a reasonable range of choice for the individual farmer. If such restrictions are necessary, let them be framed by intelligent men and women who know agriculture and rural life; not be irresponsible reformers and politicians with an eye to the ballot box. This cannot be done unless stable and conservative elements in our rural society give up the luxury of dogmatic opinion conflict and look seriously at what must be done for the good of all.

I believe we have a right to decide whether the family farm can be retained as a basic unit in our agriculture and a sustaining force in rural life and leadership. But first we must get rid of any notion that the unit can be the same size it was 50 years ago. The family farm must be large enough to give full employment to the family with a full complement of modern machinery and equipment. In fact, it seems logical to me that the ideal farm should employ two families in order to give greater freedom of action and to facilitate the transfer of the business from one generation to the next. Yes, this two-family

with our production and marketing problems. I think it more likely that we will stay far ahead of our food needs for many generations. Malthus will not save us from our predicament in the foreseeable future.

We can "dump" our surpluses abroad.

Of course, foreign exports can be substantial and important, but, have you ever stopped to think that the underfed nations of the world are agricultural nations? They cannot afford to buy food, nor can we give them food in large quantities without wrecking whatever they have that passes for an economy. No, they must first solve their own food problems through better use of their own resources. Then perhaps they can in time become industrial nations and importers of our farm produce.

There is no surplus.

We can sell anything if we try hard enough. This is another excuse we use to sweep our problems under the rug. Advertising and promotion can help, but we must still adjust our production to what is needed -- and wanted. There are more overfed than underfed people in this country. We can upgrade their diets, but will not greatly increase their food intake.

We can have any price the government will set.

How hard it is to get across the fact that the government is not a market and that in the long run we can sell only what is wanted and used!

If it is our responsibility to help frame the future, let's see what we can do about establishing some yardsticks to go by.

Let's start with an obvious one -- at least it should be obvious to the Extension Service because your whole history is wrapped up in it:



So that is our task, to guide free enterprise into stiller and deeper waters. The emerging rural community, a cross section of farmers, artisans, merchants and professional people, must build a new philosophy in a modern setting to accomplish this purpose.

We have been trained to preach stewardship of the soil, but stewardship of the country side is more important for our day. That means not only land, but water, forest resources, wildlife -- yes the very beauty of the landscape and its accessibility to people who need its ministrations to quiet the soul and bring back into focus life which has not been distorted by modern stress and strain. In this wider sense, land use is not merely a decision whether to plant corn or alfalfa. It is a community undertaking of great complexity and magnitude, involving all people, calling for intelligent decisions as to how the individual can retain the greatest liberty and still serve the general welfare.

Rural communities have a special responsibility in education. Obviously, in a world where anything can happen, where openmindedness and adaptability are the most useful human attributes, we cannot rest with vocational training alone. The FFA boy who learns how to grow a crop or fertilize a piece of ground, but who fails to learn how to read, write, speak and assume responsibility is badly educated for his time. What he learns about farming may be completely out of date in a few years.

You're getting outside the Extension field! Maybe yes -- maybe no! I believe Extension like Prairie Farmer will have to carry water on both shoulders -- or go out of business. Our technology will have to be better, sharper, more advanced and specialized, but heaven help us if this is the only thing we can do. We will have to take a firmer hold on our economics, get acquainted with social organizations and political science and take a hand in matters that we never paid much attention to before. We will serve and survive.